

[Mr. John Cacciatore]

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LIFE HISTORY

OF

MR. JOHN CACCIATORE

I was born in the town of Santa Stefano di Quisquina, Sicily, on May 12th, [1860?], and am now 75 years of age. My father was a farm peasant working the soil for a land owner. Since my early years I toiled at the farm with my father.

I was married at the age of 22 years, and then leased a tract of land which I worked planting wheat, horse feed, potatoes and vegetables. After we had been married a year, my wife gave birth to a child, a baby boy, who died when he was a year old. In the year 1885 my wife again gave birth to another son who died soon after.

In this same year I decided to come to New Orleans where many Italians were living at that time. The trip was long and tedious, lasting 30 days. I was afterwards introduced to Mr. [Vaccaro?] who was the owner of the steamship line in which I had sailed to America with my wife. We soon became fast friends, and he proposed to me that I work for him at his Produce Company in New Orleans. He handled bananas chiefly which he brought from Honduras. There I was employed as foreman, which position I held for some two years.

Several friends described Tampa to me with such glowing colors that I soon became entranced, and decided to come here and try my fortune. Accordingly, in 1887, leaving my wife in New Orleans, I took the train to [Nobile?]. [?] [Nobile?] I took the boat that brought me here. [?] disembarked at the Lafayette Street bridge. I was then 27 years of age.

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I had expected to see a flourishing city, but my expectations were too high, for what I saw before me almost brought me to tears. There was nothing, what one may truthfully say, nothing. Franklin was a long sandy street. There were very few houses, and those were far apart with tall pine trees surrounding them. The Hillsborough County Court House was a small wooden building. Some men were just beginning to work on the foundation of the Tampa Bay Hotel.

Ybor City was not connected to Tampa as it is today. There was a Wilderness between the two cities, and a distance of more than one mile between the two places. All of Ybor City was not worth one cent to me. In different places of Ybor City a tall species of grass grew, proper of swampy places. This grass grew from 5 to 6 feet high. I was completely disillusioned with what I saw. There was a stagnant water hole where the society of the Centro Espanol (Spanish Club) is today located. A small wooden bridge spanned this pond. I remember that I was afraid to cross the bridge, and especially so at night, because of the alligators that lived there. They would often crawl into the bridge and bask there in the sun all day long.

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The factory of Martinez Ybor had some twenty cigar makers; Sanches y Haya had some fifteen; while Yendas had about ten. I worked for a time at the factory of Modesto Monet as stripper, * and made 35¢ for my first day's work. Of course, I was then only learning the cigar business, and could not expect to make more. When I became skilled in my work as stripper, I would make from \$1.00 to \$1.25 a day.

While still at this work, I gradually began learning the cigar-makers' trade as I saw that they were making a much more comfortable income. When I had become somewhat proficient as a cigar-maker, I was earning from \$14.00 to \$15.00 a week.

When I had been in Tampa some two or three years I sent for my wife who was still living in New Orleans. When she arrived in Tampa she burst out crying at what she saw:

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wilderness, swamps, alligators, mosquitoes, and open closets. The only thing she would say when she arrived was: "Why have you brought me to such a place?"

Here we had two more sons, and one died. We had in all four children, of whom three died. We only had one child left whom we were able to raise.

At about this time Mr. Martinez Ybor (the cigar manufacturer) was offering homes for sale at a very low (*) stripper in a cigar factory is one who removes the stem from the tobacco leaf.

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price. I, therefore, went to him and purchased a home at the corner of 18th Street and 8th Avenue for the price of [725?]. I still have this house, although considerably remodeled. I paid \$100 cash, and the balance I paid off in monthly terms. I was able to do this with the help of my wife, she worked also at the cigar factory. We worked in several factories, sometimes in West Tampa, and sometimes in Ybor City, wherever working conditions were better.

In all, I worked 28 years at the cigar factories. At the end of this time my sight became somewhat impaired, and I was, therefore, obliged to discontinue my work.

My son grew up into a young man, married and had two children; both boys. One of my grandsons is married, and the other is still single. My son has now been out of work for the past three years.

I am living at present from what little rent I can collect from the various buildings that I own. There are families that have been living in my houses seven weeks without paying rent, yet should I wish to dislodge them I must go to the Court House and pay them \$5.00, and then wait three more weeks before they are finally dislodged.

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These properties are mine. I have worked hard in order to have them, yet I cannot do as I deem proper with them. If I cannot pay the taxes these houses will be taken from me. If I cannot collect my rents, I am not 5 able to pay the taxes. I should, therefore, be allowed to dislodge these that cannot pay their rent, and without going through so much trouble. It is not justice to expect taxes to be paid when you cannot collect your rents.

There is not much hope in Ybor City. The cigar factories are on a continuous decline. The factory of Corral & Wediska had 1500 persons working, today it has only some 150 or 200 persons.

The railroad between Tampa and Jacksonville had over 40 men working daily along the tracks, keeping the grass from growing over the rails, seeing that the [?] along the tracks were well kept, etc. Today they do not have a single man doing this.

The Trust has also purchased many factories here and have removed them to the Northern cities.

The people of Ybor City are orphans, not only of father and mother, but of everything in life. They cannot find work at the cigar factories because of the machines. If the government would place a tax of \$5,000 on each {?}, the manufacturers would soon have to discontinue them, and there would be work for those that are still left here.

Under present conditions the people of Ybor City have no other alternative but to leave for New York City. Here they get only 50¢ a week for the maintenance of a whole family, and the single person is not given any relief 6 whatever. In New York City they are given a home, groceries, coal to warm themselves in winter, and electric lights. Here they are not given anything.

There is not an employee of Hav-a-Tampa that is from Ybor City. All their employees are women who come from little towns near Tampa. The factory is situated here in Ybor City,

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yet very few Latins if any, are employed. This factory pays their employees whatever they please.